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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3423
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6779
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4508
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3129
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7652
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1727
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5062
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1269
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7394

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000424

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Syria/Russia, Syria/US, Sharm al-Sheikh Conference,
Winograd Report, Lebanon, Palestinian Territories, Lebanon, Iraq
(5/4-7)

11. Summary: Syrian papers on May 5 reported FM Mouallem's participation in the Ministerial Conference of Iraq's Neighboring Countries held in Sharm al-Sheikh on May 4. In his speech at the conference, Mouallem stressed the need to schedule withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq in accordance with a timetable agreed upon with the Iraqi government, in parallel with building the national Iraqi army to give hope for the return of a united and independent Iraq. Mouallem warned against transforming talks on national reconciliation in Iraq into mere mottoes, instead of political work to guarantee Iraq's unity. Papers on May 4 reported that, on the sidelines of the conference on May 3, Mouallem met with Secretary Rice about the situation in Iraq, and with Russian FM Lavrov, about the situation in the region, particularly in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. Mouallem also met on May 3 with the European Union's High Coordinator for Foreign Policy, Javier Solana, for talks on relations between Syria and the EU. Mouallem also took part in a meeting of the follow-up committee of the Arab peace initiative with members of the International Quartet Committee.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Mouallem's meeting with Rice in Sharm al-Sheikh focuses on bilateral relations and on the situation in Iraq. Mouallem: The meeting was frank and clear; contacts will continue"
(Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/4)

"The Sharm al-Sheikh statement emphasizes Iraq's unity and Arabism. FM al-Mouallem: National reconciliation is a basic action and not a motto; scheduling withdrawal of occupation forces is required"
(Government-owned Tishreen, 5/5)

"On the sidelines of the Sharm al-Sheikh conference, FM Mouallem takes part in the meeting of the follow-up committee on the Arab peace initiative and reviews regional developments with Russian FM Lavrov and Syria-European relations with Solana" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/6)

"The Sharm al-Sheikh conference ends without a US-Iranian meeting.

Demand for scheduling withdrawal from Iraq disappears in the harmonizing statement of the conference" (Independent al-Watan, 5/6)

"The Arab Peace Initiative Committee meets Ki-Moon in Sharm al-Sheikh with the participation of Syria" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/4)

"The Lebanese situation reaches an impasse. The opposition proposes a solution. Hizbollah SecGen Nasrallah: The solution is to refer to the people and hold early elections" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/7)

"UNIFIL denies weapon smuggling to South Lebanon. President Lahoud hints at a constitutional step if the crisis continues. Lebanese opposition: Some have not learned the lesson from the Winograd Report" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/5)

"President Lahoud reiterates Lebanon's commitment to the resistance and its weapons. Lahoud: The al-Saniora government is illegitimate. Berri: It is demolishing Lebanon" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/6)

"Closed consultations between Democrats and the White House. Bush warns against Al-Qaeda's control in Iraq. Al-Zawahiri announces Washington's defeat in Iraq" (Independent al-Watan, 5/7)

"US losses in Iraq on the rise: The killing of 9 US soldiers in Diyala increases the number to 25 within one week" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/7)

"US soldiers mistreat Iraqis. The popularity of President Bush declines to 28%" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/6)

"Palestinians' refusal of the US security plan in Gaza and the West

Bank: It aims at aborting Palestinian resistance" (Government-owned Tishreen, 5/6)

"The Israeli Winograd Committee moves the battle to the Israeli streets" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 5/4)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"When Will Americans Carry Out the Last of the Baker-Hamilton Recommendations?"

Muhyi-al-Din al-Muhammad, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/6): "The Sharm al-Sheikh conference on Iraq showed common denominators among participants, mainly an international unanimity on the need to help Iraq overcome its plight.... But the conference has failed to call for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq....

"The conferees were supposed to show interest in and approve a substantial point, but they didn't. It is the need to schedule the withdrawal of the American and other forces that occupy Iraq. The approval of that point would have made it more possible to implement the other recommendations.

"Iraq's neighbors are sincere in their interest in Iraq's stability because instability in Iraq reflects negatively on them....

"It is regrettable that the US Administration has still not made up its mind and acknowledged the need to set a timetable for withdrawal, as recommended by the Baker-Hamilton Committee. This is the case even though developments have proven that this administration, which fully rejected the committee's recommendations immediately after they were made a few months ago, is actually implementing them one recommendation after another. Perhaps the recommendation on withdrawal will be the last to be implemented - that is, several months later and only when the Iraqi people have offered more victims and the defeat of the invading forces has

become fully clear."

"Arbiter, Not Adversary"

Isam Dari, chief editor of government-owned Tishreen, wrote (5/5):
"In its relations with other countries, Syria does not look for difficulties, practice terrorism, sanctify wars, or evade peace and its requirements. The talk about difficulties must be addressed to those who create difficulties and hinder any effort toward a breakthrough in relations and toward the just and comprehensive peace that nations hope for.

"We are here commenting on US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's remark after her meeting with FM Mouallem that 'we do not want to have a difficult relationship with Syria.'

"Secretary Rice's statement is very fine and promising, not only because the US Administration is saying that it does not want to have a difficult relationship with Syria, but also because this administration has finally taken the step that it should have taken long ago, namely, engaging in direct dialogue rather than making fiery statements, threats, dictates, and accusations from afar.

"We trust that any meeting, no matter how limited in its agenda and regardless of whether it is confined to one subject or more, indicates a belated conviction on the part of the American decision-makers that the policy of isolation, siege, and sanctions is useless and will not lead to solutions to problems and crises, and that peoples are not managed by remote control and are not ready to abandon their sovereignty and relinquish their rights no matter

what the pressure on them and regardless of the sacrifices they make.

"In full clarity, frankness, and transparency we say that Syria is indeed willing to engage in dialogue with the United States. This, however, does not mean we are begging for this dialogue....
"The opportunity is still there if the US Administration really wants to go down in history as a peacemaker, not as an igniter of wars. Naturally, peace is made through serious and creative dialogue, not through the policies of isolation and the promotion of creative or destructive instability here and there....

"Have we started to see a kind of change in American policy toward the region?

"Without being overtly optimistic and without giving pessimism precedence over hope, we say that the road to peace is not difficult. Perhaps the late start of the dialogue will be a real beginning for the good of the region and its peoples, serving the interests of everyone, and above all, the interest of world peace. We expect the United States to be the arbiter, not the adversary, and to support peace, not war."

"Sharm al-Sheikh: a Chance for Hope"

Samir Al-Shibani, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen wrote (5/5): "The Sharm al-Sheikh conference on Iraq gives some hope that Iraq will be saved from the tragic situation caused by the US occupation.... More than one party now sees the need to come out of the Iraqi crisis....

"The conference reflects international attention that the US Administration finds difficult to curb or ignore....

"Reaching a formula for meeting and understanding and recognizing the importance of the roles of Iraq's neighbors constitute a realistic and logical beginning for a solution because the

neighboring countries are more interested in Iraq's security, unity, and stability than others are, and any problem in Iraq reflects on them before it reflects on others."

"It is important to achieve Iraqi reconciliation on national, not sectarian, bases.... There is a need for all parties to engage in the political process and, more importantly, to set a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq...."

"Most Useful Choice"

Muhammad Ali Buzah, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (5/4): "Arabs must make use of the findings of the Winograd report in their conflict with Israel. The war on Lebanon offered a living and honorable model of what the Arab nation's option should be in its effort to preserve its dignity and honor and regain the usurped lands and rights, namely, the option of resistance, which has proven effective and useful in a world that, regrettably, recognizes only the strong, and against a racist occupation enemy that never understood, and will never understand, anything other than the logic of force...."

"Dwarfing"

Maha Sultan, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote

(5/6): "The US proposal for removing Israeli roadblocks in the West Bank in return for a Palestinian halt to the firing of missiles is an attempt to diminish the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict...."

"The US Administration will in the next few months do everything it can to score further achievements for Israel in an effort to improve the chances of the Republicans in the next presidential election...."

Corbin